

Sonoko in Reminiscence

The Taisha—

An exceedingly powerful organization that worships the object of the people's faith, the Shinju, within the isolated world known as Shikoku.

Enshrined in a room administered by this organization was a single girl.

She was not „spending her day“ or „living“ here; she was „enshrined“ in the literal sense of the word. For she could hardly move her body anymore.

Although her entire head was covered in unsightly bandages, one could tell from the beautiful eye and mouth that were left unconcealed that her face was extraordinarily well-shaped. Those who see her for the first time might easily mistake her for a doll created by a renowned artist.

The girl's name was Nogi Sonoko.

One of the three Heroes who fought the servants of the gods that invaded Shikoku, the „Vertex.“

The room Sonoko was enshrined in was ornate with sacred decorations. She was without any doubt an object of the Taisha's worship. On par with the legendary warriors who died in battle and were allowed to join the ranks of the gods.

„Sukucchi, Dai-kun, Doku. You're all so lively~.“

Sonoko watched the fairies that were floating around her with empty eyes.

Fairies were beings that support Heroes in battle. They provide a connection to the source of the Heroes' power, the Shinju, protect them from enemy attacks in battle and help them in various other ways.

Three fairies were floating around Sonoko at the time. They were Ryoumensukuna, Daidarabocchi and Gashadokuro. But these were merely a fraction of the fairies protecting Sonoko.

In total, twenty-one fairies were in Sonoko's possession.

Whenever a Hero uses „mankai“ to unleash their full power, they receive

another fairy.

However, each use of *mankai* also causes the loss of a bodily function.

Sonoko had twenty-one fairies — which meant that she went through *mankai* twenty times. Accordingly, she had lost most of her bodily functions. This was the sacrifice she had to make in order to destroy twelve Vertexes all by herself during her final battle as a Hero.

As Sonoko gazed at the fairies floating in the air, she suddenly noticed the presence of a person approaching her.

Sonoko made her fairies disappear and waited wearily for her visitor.

Masked Taisha priests clad in white robes entered the room.

The elderly priest at their front bowed before Sonoko and addressed her.

„Oh most esteemed Nogi Sonoko-sama, please allow me to humbly speak to you. The current safety of our land is the fruit of your efforts, Sonoko-sama, and your glorious deed verily surpasses those of the fallen warriors revered for eternity. May I inquire how you are feeling today?“

„Your introduction’s too long,“

Sonoko said annoyedly.

Although she had lost most of her bodily functions, she narrowly managed to retain her ability to hear and speak.

„HEY, Sonoko! How’s it goin’ today!? Just that would be enough. That’s what you wanted to say, right~?“

„I could not address you in such a discourteous manner, Sonoko-sama.“

„If you waste 80% on the introduction and just 20% on the real issue I’ll doze off before you get to the point. Are you fine with me dozing off?“

„...I shall see what I can do,“

the old priest answered, but it was unlikely that he would change anything. She felt as if she had become better at dealing with the priests, but they weren’t particularly flexible. Perhaps it was a result of the organization’s long existence. Just like rubber loses its elasticity over time, the organization known

as the Taisha has also deteriorated as the years passed.

„There’s nothing wrong, I’m fit as a fiddle~. ...But even if I say that, I still can’t move my body~.“

„I am glad to hear that you are in good health. If there is anything you need, please do not hesitate to summon us at any time. Sonoko-sama, we are most grateful for the audience you have honored us with today and shall carefully listen to any wish you voice with the utmost reverence.“

As expected, the words they spoke as they left the room were formal and respectful. Sonoko was annoyed by this, but she didn’t speak up as she thought that this couldn’t be helped anymore.

Their audience with her was merely a formality. For it was just as much of a „ritual“ as their daily prayers to the spirits of the ancestors and the Shinju.

„But I’m... a human. I’m just Wasshi’s and Mino-san’s friend Sonocchi,“ mumbled Sonoko, who was now all alone in her room.

She had already accepted and swallowed her disgust at the way she was treated as something that wasn’t human, as something that was to be worshipped.

It was something that couldn’t be helped.

She used these words to suppress her anger at all this absurdity and lack of reason.

It can’t be helped.

How often had Sonoko repeated these words in her head since that day? Since that day— the day Sonoko was enshrined as a deity.

When she saw that her daughter could no longer move after having repelled twelve Vertexes, Sonoko’s mother sank down to her knees and wept. Her father was not quite as easy to read, but one could tell from his bitter expression that he was repressing his feelings.

Her mother spoke in a shaky voice.

„Why... did Sonoko end up...”

Her father bottled up his emotions and answered monotonously.

„You must not think that she was the only one. The daughter of the Washio household suffered the same fate to some extent. Not to mention the Minowa household...”

„Sonoko is all that matters to me... I can't compare her to others or think about who is better or worse off...”

„...Of course. You're absolutely right. However, the Nogi household... is that kind of family. We have vowed to do anything... to make any sacrifice necessary in order to protect this country and its people. This is the duty of the Nogis...

„Ah-aaaah...!”

As Sonoko saw the tears in her mother's eyes and the anguish in her father's face, she thought that lamenting herself won't change anything.

No matter how much she grieved and cried, her body won't go back to the way it was.

It would just cause her mother and father unnecessary pain. That's why Sonoko put on a smile, even if she had to force it. She acted just like the usual easy-going and carefree Nogi Sonoko.

„Father, mother, you're being too dramatic~. I can't really move my body anymore, that's all. I can still talk like this, so I'm tootally fine. Maybe I'm actually lucky that I can sleep all day and don't need to study anymore~.”

Hearing their daughter's words didn't cause the faces of her parents to lighten up, but Sonoko believed that it was still better than to bewail her own misery.

It can't be helped.

During her final battle, Sonoko saw the world outside the wall with her own eyes. She came to understand many things at that moment. The present state of Shikoku. The crisis mankind was facing. Someone had to fight in order to protect this world, even if it meant becoming a sacrifice. For if they didn't, all of mankind would perish.

As she made herself aware of her no longer beating heart, Sonoko thought—
It can't be helped.

And thus, Sonoko was enshrined and worshipped in this room at the mercy of the Taisha.

Female priests were charged with taking care of Sonoko's body.

Owing to that, she was not entirely impaired despite her inability to move.

Additionally, the Taisha respected Sonoko's will as much as possible and granted her wishes.

It wasn't like the Taisha made someone a sacrifice by choice.

It was something they had to do in order to protect the world, and so they did.

It wasn't anyone's fault.

It couldn't be helped.

She was now able to learn various things about the world that she was never told before.

Such as how the world ended up in such a hopeless state.

Over 300 years ago, during the Christian Era, the Vertex suddenly appeared. They were beings sent by the Gods of Heaven to eradicate mankind. Gods of Heaven who desire the end of the human race and Gods of the Land who sided with humanity— this was the framework of the world.

At that time, girls borrowed the energy of the Land Gods and manifested their powers as the first Heroes.

However, the Heroes of the first generation did not win the battle of the Christian Era. Mankind continued its resistance using the power of the aggregated Land Gods, the Shinju, but the Gods of Heaven altered the laws of the world themselves.

Thus, everything save for the area inside the wall protected by the Shinju was transformed into the scorching realm Sonoko had seen.

As the Vertex attacks on Shikoku became increasingly fierce and many Heroes of the first generation lost their lives, humanity judged that it was impossible to resist any further and eventually raised the white flag. It chose to abandon its fight and submitted in order to survive.

In doing so, they sacrificed six mikos in a ritual known as the „Festival of the Fire Offering“ to earn the Heavenly Gods’ forgiveness. Thus, the Gods of Heaven stopped their attacks on mankind and the battles of the Christian Era came to a close.

At the end of their desperate struggle, only a single Hero was left alive. In the aftermath, she became the leader of humanity and took upon herself the role of the leader of the people.

This was a brief history of the tragedy that unfolded in the Christian Era.

The world beyond the barrier has perished. But many people have fought desperately and sacrificed themselves, so there was no one to blame.

It was something that couldn’t be helped.

The lands outside of Shikoku were destroyed, the Christian Era ended, the Divine Era took its place and the Vertex invasions ceased.

However, the roughly 300 years up to the present time were not simply a time of peace. Even though the Vertex no longer attacked, other incidents occurred that endangered mankind.

For example, some who were enchanted by the overwhelming might of the Heavenly Gods carried out large-scale terrorist attacks around the time when the Divine Era had only just begun.

To mere humans, gods are all too dazzling beings. Even the wisdom of man, which has been amassed since time immemorial, has to yield helplessly in the face of the gods’ power.

The Gods of Heaven are exceptional, magnificent, divine—

That one faction of the besieged, weary mankind was drawn to the Heavenly Gods might have been just another thing that couldn't be helped.

Their terrorism plunged Shikoku into chaos, but was eventually quelled by the Akamine family.

Thus, humanity just barely managed to keep itself alive in its isolated world.

But after around 300 years had passed, the Vertex invasions began anew.

Mankind would meet its end if it failed to defeat the Vertex. That's why someone had to become a Hero and fight them.

It was something that couldn't be helped. As was Nogi Sonoko's, Washi Sumi's and Minowa Gin's sacrifice.

However, Sonoko thought—

„The Gods of Heaven and the Gods of the Land should just leave us humans alone. Don't you agree?“

said Sonoko to a Taisha priest who had come to deliver her meal.

The priest didn't give an answer.

Instead, he responded with a question.

„What makes you think so, Sonoko-sama?“

„Because we don't understand what the gods are thinking, you see. Their goals, their reasons and their principles aren't something we humans can comprehend. And if that's the case, then how can we know that our conception that the Gods of Heaven are enemies who want to exterminate humans and the Gods of the Land are allies of mankind is really correct?“

„...“

„Maybe the gods don't think anything of humans. What if the Gods of the Land and the Gods of Heaven started a quarrel among themselves and simply used us humans as pawns in their game— what if the gods don't care at all about protecting or destroying mankind?“

The more she learned about the history of humanity, the more she felt like

the people have merely been toyed with by the gods.

„In truth, humans don't need the gods. We don't need the meddling of the Gods of Heaven and not the help from the Gods of the Land either. Because humanity can stand on its own.

„...Sonoko-sama, I have most humbly listened to your words. Concerning this matter, I shall take your feelings sincerely to heart, and will be sure to share them with the other—„

„It's fine, you don't have to do that. I was just thinking out loud, you know.“

Sonoko coldly interrupted the priest.

„...It is just as you say, Sonoko-sama. It may be impossible for us mere humans to understand the gods. To them, humans seem like such insignificant creatures. The fate of mankind, even its survival or extinction, is a trifling matter to the gods. Perhaps they do indeed think nothing of us. Perhaps the Shinju-sama does not see us as anything special. But still... even then, we would not have been able to face the menace from the outside if it wasn't for the power we borrowed from the Gods of the Land, from the Shinju-sama. The power of the Land Gods and the Shinju-sama is indispensable to us.“

„I know... in this situation we're in it can't be helped, right?“

It can't be helped.

It is something that can't be helped.

Time was passing by.

It was easy for her to lose track of time, unable to move and enshrined within this confined room.

The view in front of her eyes never changed and the things that happened were always the same.

The days felt like she was drifting through a viscous liquid.

However, Sonoko has been counting the days since the end of her final battle. Today was the 232nd day.

„If that’s true, then I’ve graduated from Shinju-kan and became a middle schooler already, huh?“

Sonoko muttered to herself as the priests arrived for their audience with her.

The elderly priest who lead them answered.

„Indeed, Sonoko-sama.“

„Wasshi and Mino-san are middle schoolers too, right?“

„If Minowa Gin-sama was still alive, this would have indeed been the case.“

„I wanted to see Gin as a middle schooler~. I wonder what she’d have been like~?“

Maybe Gin would have continued to grow up the way she was in elementary school and remained an energetic tomboy.

Or perhaps she would have become more feminine during adolescence and grown up to be a lovely young lady.

There was even a chance that Gin would have fallen in love with a boy and turned into a lovesick maiden.

No matter what kind of Gin she would have ended up as, Sonoko would have loved to see her. Because she was an irreplaceable friend of hers.

„I wonder how Wasshi is doing~.“

„...“

When she brought up her other precious friend, the elderly priest remained silent.

„Hey. Wasshi’s also a middle schooler now~. She used mankai in that last battle, so she must have also suffered some loss... What she lost are probably the ‘function of her legs’ and her ‘memories.’“

The old priest did not answer.

„It is a bit inconveniencing, but even if you lost your memories and can’t move your legs anymore, you can still lead a normal everyday life. Wasshi did properly enroll in middle school, didn’t she?“

„...“

„Hey, I want to see Wasshi. Won't you let me meet her~.“

„Sonoko-sama. I cannot do that.“

„Eeh, but why~?“

„I am not authorized to answer this question.“

„But you can let me see her for a little bit at least, right? It's no big deal~.“

„I am very sorry. I cannot.“

The old priest answered in a straightforward manner.

She could not get through to him.

The priests of the Taisha would always respect Sonoko's wishes as best they could.

For example, if she said that she wanted something delicious to eat, Shikoku's best chef would be called to show his skills in front of Sonoko's eyes.

If she said that she wanted to try out a game, all kinds of video game consoles and ultra high

spec PCs would be provided to her, and a dedicated priest would play the games as Sonoko instructed him to. She was able to handle any game this way.

No matter what Sonoko asked for, the Taisha would fulfill her every wish.

Her wish to meet her friends, however, was the one thing they would adamantly deny her.

„But you know, letting me meet my friends is a really simple request. If I just went to school every day and lived an ordinary life, I could see my friends all the time. It's much, much simpler than letting me eat the best food in Shikoku or getting me an ultra high spec computer. ...But that's the one thing you won't do?“

„I'm very sorry.“

„...I see.“

Sonoko could tell from the old priest's tone that it was pointless to say any

more, so she let the matter rest. Maybe this priest didn't have the authority to grant Sonoko's wish.

It couldn't be helped.

If one is worshipped as a deity, one earns the privilege of having wishes fulfilled that would never come true for ordinary people. But on the other hand, certain things that anyone else would be able to do easily are strictly limited.

It can't be helped.

Time was passing by without her wish to see her friends being granted.

It has already been around 400 days since Sonoko was enshrined.

„Mr. Priest, Mr. Priest. Today is November the tenth, right?“

Sonoko asked a young priest who attended to her at her side.

„Yes. This is correct.“

„It's Mino-san's birthday.“

„...“

The priest fell silent.

Minowa Gin. The girl who lost her life in battle. Had she been alive, she would have turned thirteen today.

„We've looked it up in a fortune telling book one time. The characteristics of people born in November. It said that they have a strong sense of justice, they pull through with anything they've set their sights on and they are reckless and headstrong. Mino-san was exactly like that~.“

„Yes, I do believe so. Minowa Gin-sama possessed a strong and righteous spirit, for she protected this country to the bitter end.“

„That's right~.“

Sonoko laughed joyfully. This priest didn't know. There was one more character trait of November-born people written down in the fortune telling book.

„Sonoko-sama, there is another thing I would like you to hear regarding Minowa Gin-sama.“

It was unusual that a priest would bring up a subject in front of Sonoko.

„It is about Minowa Gin-sama’s terminal.“

„...Ah, that story?“

The terminal that Gin used to turn into a Hero was left behind after she died. Girls who had sufficient Hero aptitude and a similar disposition to Gin’s could inherit this terminal and become Heroes themselves.

Fundamentally, whether one can become a Hero or not wasn’t determined by aptitude alone.

There was one more criterion that humans had no control over, namely „being chosen by the Shinju.“ For this reason, not even the Taisha could simply pick out people and turn them into Heroes as they please.

But it was confirmed that the one to take over Gin’s terminal would in fact become a Hero. Therefore, a rigorous examination to decide the successor of the device was underway at the time.

This was one of the two projects the Taisha set into motion to provide against future Vertex invasions.

„The selection of the terminal’s successor is proceeding well. Would you like to see the list of the examinees who are left?“

„You don’t have to show me. This isn’t something I should poke my nose into, right?“

„One of the remaining candidates is Miyoshi Harunobu’s younger sister. But regardless of her being his sister, her outstanding performance makes her a strong candidate for Gin-sama’s terminal.“

„I see. This must be... hard on him too.“

Miyoshi Harunobu was one of the Taisha’s priests. Sonoko met him on several occasions before. Although he was still quite young, he was extraordinarily talented and was rapidly rising through the ranks of the Taisha.

There was a high chance that his younger sister would become a Hero.

Although it is a great honor to become a Hero, Harunobu must have been aware that it also comes with a risk. In that case, he couldn't simply rejoice over his sister being the most likely candidate. There was no way his heart could be at ease thinking of the suffering she would have to endure once she becomes a Hero.

(But still... Miyoshi-san's little sister, huh. I wonder what she's like~.)

Gin's successor candidates were said to be similar in nature to her.

This piqued her interest.

But she started to feel uneasy at the same time. If a girl who resembles Gin were to become a Hero that would surely cause her pain.

She felt as if Gin was made to fight a second time. As if Gin, who endured so many injuries and took so much pain upon herself, was made to suffer once more.

But it can't be helped.

The Vertex will attack again. That's why someone had to fight.

(It can't be helped... right...?)

Perhaps because of Gin's birthday, the desire to see Sumi grew stronger inside Sonoko.

Sonoko begged the Taisha priests countless times to let her meet Sumi.

But the Taisha would not grant this wish.

They complied with all of her other requests, but her wish to see her friend remained unfulfilled.

Unbearable feelings were whirling around inside of her.

Sonoko saw if she could make tyrannical requests the priests couldn't possibly satisfy.

„I want to eat a Manchu Han Imperial Feast.“

The „Manchu Han Imperial Feast“ that was held long ago in a country known as China.

It was an outlandishly extravagant full-course dinner spanning over several days with a total of 158 dishes being served and eaten accompanied by entertainment. And yet, a Manchu Han Imperial Fest was prepared as per Sonoko's wish.

„I want to see manzai and rakugo and noh and kyougen live~.“

A stage was promptly set up in a room of a Taisha shrine's main building. Popular Manzai duos, rakugo story tellers, noh actors and kyougen troupes were summoned and performed all day long on the stage.

„Mahjong looks fun. I'd like to try it~.“

A mahjong table was set up and four priests were gathered. One of them played his hand as Sonoko told him to.

One of the priests remarked:

„If you wish for it, we shall also play go or shogi or chess. We would even try to arrange a mock battle with flesh-and-blood people and real weapons. Anything that serves to ease Sonoko-sama's mind.“

„You'd do all that for me... but you still won't let me see Wasshi, huh.“

„My sincerest apologies.“

„Forget it. The Chinese feast, manzai, mahjong... those aren't what I want.“

She wanted to be with her friend. That was all.

Afer the priests left, Sonoko gazed at the fairies that manifested around her and began to talk.

„Really, those Taisha guys have zero flexibility~. They're all so pig-headed, sheesh. I just want to meet my friend for a little bit.“

Her fairies kept floating around without answering her.

„But it can't be helped, huh~... I got to learn about all kinds of things, and my status... is different from before. ...It can't be helped... that Mino-san died... and

that Wasshi and I lost so much... and that I can't be with Wasshi... and that others will become Heroes and be hurt... it can't be helped..."

It can't be helped.

It can't be helped.

It can't be helped. It can't be helped. It can't be helped. It can't be helped. It can't be helped. It can't be helped. Can't be helped. Can't be helped. Can't be helped. Can't be helped can't be helped. Can't be helped can't be helped can't be helped can't be helped can't be helped can't be helped can't be helped.

„You can't... you can't just put up with anything simply by saying these words...!“

Sonoko said in a forced voice.

„My friends suffered, they mourned, they lost their memories, they had their life taken away! I became like this and can't even meet my friend...! And still, the people around me and the gods only care about their own convenience! How... how is this fair!? I can't say 'it can't be helped' to anything and everything and accept it...! Give it back...! Turn us back! So that it can be the three of us again! Like back then...!! Aaah... aaaaah...!

Sonoko's anguished cry echoed through the room.

She was no raging god. She was no enshrined legend.

She was no more than a simple girl.

The fairies floated by her side as if out of concern for their master.

After she had screamed out all her anger and sadness until her voice had become hoarse, Sonoko once again stared at her fairies with empty eyes and whispered melancholically:

„...I’m sorry, this has nothing to do with you guys... It can’t be helped, saying all that won’t change a thing...”

From then on, Sonoko no longer made any great demands to the priests of

the Taisha. She also asked to see Sumi less often.

She had shut it all away. It's not that she came to terms with it. It's not that she had given up. She still wished to be with Sumi like before. But she realized that this was something that wouldn't be granted, no matter how much she pleaded with the Taisha.

Within this confined room furnished with a bed, Sonoko was once again staring off into the distance.

„Mino-san's birthday is November the tenth. Wasshi's birthday is April the eighth. ...I got to know both of their birthdays back then...”

She recalled that day the three of them spent together—

It was around the time when Sonoko and the others had won their third battle as Heroes and the formerly standoffish Sumi had considerably opened up to them.

„Tada~ah!! Check this out~!”

One day during lunch break, Sonoko proudly presented a thick book to Sumi and Gin. It was an old-fashioned, faded hardcover.

„What's that?”

said Gin with a puzzled expression while eating her lunch.

Sumi took a look at the cover. The title was written in calligraphy.

„‘The Great Tome of Occult Divination Practices’ is what it says.”

„Uwah. Surprised you can read that, Sumi. The kanji are difficult and they're written all fancy with a brush, no way I could read it. And even now that I heard the title I still have no idea what's it about.”

„To put it simply, it's a ‘fortune telling manual.’”

„That's right~! I found it by chance yesterday while I was rummaging through our library to get some inspiration for my novels~. According to the description on the first page, it has amazing fortune telling methods that combine astrology, I Ching divination, tarot reading, palm reading, rune reading and

animal fortune telling~!“

„Th-this book seems fishy...”

Sumi frowned. She wasn't well-versed in fortune telling, but she still had the feeling that these were too many things mixed together.

„Huh~... Then we might as well try to tell a fortune!”

Gin seemed highly interested.

„Yeah, yeah~! Okay, tell me both of your birthdays~.”

„Mine's November tenth!”

„It's April the eighth.”

Upon hearing Gin's and Sumi's replies, Sonoko started to flip through the pages of the book.

„Uuum~... Mino-san. As someone born in November, you have a strong sense of justice and the willpower to pull through with anything you set your sights on. You tend to be reckless because of that, so be careful. In contrast to your outward behavior, you are pure at heart. The most maidenly of all.”

„I thought it seemed fishy, but this fortune telling book is unexpectedly accurate... It managed to capture Gin's essence.”

„Huh, the most maidenly!? Really?”

Gin seemed unconvinced, but Sumi and Sonoko nodded their heads in agreement with the results of the divination.

„As for the April-born Wasshi~... You're old-fashioned and narrow-minded. But you change through contact with other people. You might change fundamentally before long. A caterpillar that can turn into a butterfly.”

„Wait, did I get that right!? Those huge cannons are going to get even bigger!? Is this an arms race!?”

„Where are you looking while you say that, Gin!?”

Sumi folded her arms to conceal her chest and lightly glared at Gin.

„Good grief... So, when is your birthday, Sonocchi?”

„August the thirty-first. Just before the end of summer vacation~. Even though it's my birthday I always feel gloomy~,“

Sonoko said dejectedly.

„I see, that means Sumi is the oldest out of the three of us because she was born in April. Yup, those huge cannons confirm it.“

„Again, where are you looking while you say that, Gin!?“

„If we were siblings, Sumi would be our older sister, I'd be in the middle and Gin would be the youngest in the family~.“

„I'd be the youngest... the youngest in the family, huh?“

Upon hearing Sonoko's words, Gin nodded as if she was pondering on something.

„What is wrong, Gin?“

„Ah. You know, I'm the oldest out of my siblings. Thinking that I'd be the youngest sister is something new to me,“

Gin said, slightly embarrassed. She was one of three siblings in her family. Gin was the eldest sister and the other two were her younger brothers.

„Alright, Sumi-onee-sama! Say something a big sister would say!“

„Why 'onee-sama'!?“

„Well, it kinda feels right? Now, say something big sister-like, pleez!

„U-uhm...“

Taken off-guard by Gin's demand, Sumi desperately tried to think of something to say.

„G-Gin. You mustn't neglect your studies. Think of your future and strive for excellence in both academics and...“

„Sumi-onee-sama, you're overly stiff.“

„Sonocchi-onee-sama is way too serious~.“ [TN: She actually says Sonocchi here, I guess it's an error.]

Sumi's big-sisterly line did not quite strike a chord with her two younger

sisters.

„Sumi-onee-sama, you're so stiff that you might end up missing your opportunity to marry. As your younger sister, I am deeply concerned.“

„I-I don't think... that would happen.“

„Don't worry~. Even if you don't find anyone to marry, we'll always be there for you, Sumi-onee-sama~. Because we're sisters, you see~.“

„I'm glad to hear, but it's also a bit troubling...“

Their pretend play continued even after school. They made a stop at Ines to eat gelato on their way home.

„Sumi-onee-sama! I heard that older sisters are expected to share sweets with their beloved little sisters.“

„In other words, you want this gelato?“

„I already have my roasted soy bean one, but if you were to let me try your wasanbon gelato I could enjoy two flavors in one go.“

Gin opened her mouth in wait for a taste of Sumi's gelato.

Sumi was aware that she did the same with Sonoko once.

She scooped up a spoonful of her gelato and put it into Gin's mouth.

„Ah, delicious! Wasanbon flavor is pretty good! My faith as a follower of the roasted soy bean is starting to waver!“

„I'm also your big sister, right? Here, say 'aah.' My dear sister~ waver more~.“

Sonoko brought her gelato to Gin's mouth as well.

„Mmmh, that's rum raisin. Three flavors in one go! Being the little sis isn't that bad once in a while~.“

(But in the end, roasted soy bean flavor was still your favorite, Mino-san~.)

Sonoko laughed involuntarily.

Her memories of the times the three of them were together were by far more enjoyable than any extravagant food or entertainment.

This is why Sonoko kept recalling these memories over and over again.

By replaying her past in her head, she blotted out this long, long time of idleness.

However— when Sonoko happened to return to reality, she was unable to move and all alone in her confined room.

„...The gods, the world, I don't care about any of that...”

If only the three of them could have fun together— that would be enough.

The year 299 of the Divine Era was quietly drawing to a close.